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March 14, 2023

Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
300 Capitol Avenue | Hartford, CT 06106

Dear members of the Education Committee,

I am writing today to share my general comments about H.B. 6884. As former elementary public-school educator for ten years, the NCLB years, and now an associate professor of elementary education at Central Connecticut State University, I understand what this bill aims to do, and there are many good pieces here, yet there are some concerns within the bill I will briefly address.

First, I fully support the following:

- **Minimum Teacher Salary** - Establishing minimum teacher salary of 4x FPL for a family of 1 (\$58,320);
- **COVID Benefit Enhancement** – For educators who worked through the pandemic (2019 and 2020), includes a benefit multiplier of 25% increase for those two years for those who retire between 2026-2029; 50% between 2029-2032; 150% between 2032-2035; 200% for retirements after 2035;
- **Teacher Tax Credit** - \$500 refundable income tax credit for teachers with an Initial Certificate;
- **Duty-Free Prep Time** - Establishes minimum uninterrupted prep time of 30 mins.;
- **Educator Bill of Rights** - BOEs will adopt an Educator Bill of Rights, which includes but is not limited to: (1) environment free from threats or harassment—students, parents, caregivers, fellow teachers and administrators; (2) freedom to teach books to grapple with complex issues in society—past and present—without fear of being fired or told on by parents, caregivers, and/or community members; and (3) use symbols, flags, and other items related to the well-being of students, which support one’s identity rather than used as an attack or threat to one’s identity, one’s belief system. In supporting what can be included, I heed the words of Robert Jones, Jr., who says “We can disagree and still love one another unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist.”

The parts of the bill of which I take issue as written:

- **Ending edTPA** - Eliminates the edTPA standardized portfolio system for aspiring educators effective July 1, 2025
- **Play-based Learning** - Requires Play-based Learning to be incorporated in preK and K; Permits PBL in grades 1 - 5; permits BOE to exclude a student from Play-based Learning based on BOE policy.

While I agree with eliminating edTPA, the stressors on students and the corporate profit for Pearson are astounding. As written, “the Commissioner of Education, the president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and the dean of the Neag School of Education at The University of Connecticut shall jointly develop a preservice performance assessment to be implemented in teacher preparation programs”, much is of concern. First, the President of the CSCU system does not, and may not have if a new president is appointed by 2025, have an educational background, a background in schooling, teaching, educating, learning, and teacher preparation; I cannot find the educational background, of being in teacher preparation and being a public school teacher, for the current Commissioner of Education, which is problematic they are to be included here. Second, how does the dean of UCONN get to be involved, yet the faculty and those of us in teacher preparation, especially those of us who are certified public school educators, those who have gone through teacher preparation, taught, and are now in academia in teacher preparation, are not included; we are left out of the development of a new system. Thirdly, I do not believe a new system should be implemented. We must put trust in teacher preparation professionals because many of us do our jobs to meet the state regulations and prepare future educators. In short, we are replacing one assessment with another, while students are still required to pass Praxis II exams to be certified.

The other concern I have is with play-based learning. While there are benefits to play-based learning, I believe the lack of criteria in the bill can lead to misinterpretations and be tied to academic performance outcomes, rather than being a less restrictive endeavor in schools. Also, the concern with having a school employee deny the right to play-based learning is very concerning, which could lead to denial of participation to many children, especially those who may need it most. Further, to remove electronic devices is problematic in that these devices can be places for students to communicate, students who have difficulty interacting with others.

While I applaud the spirit of this bill, I do hope, in the future, members of the committee will meet with those of us who have dedicated our whole lives to the profession of teaching, of educating. There are a lot of reasons why teachers are overwhelmed, a lot of reasons not addressed in this bill (such as: scripted curricula; district mandates pitting teachers against one another with test scores; parental involvement at all hours of the day; lack of administrator support for teachers; all the neoliberal corporateness ideology of schooling and teaching; and many more), so I implore all of you to reach out to educators and those in teacher preparation around the state, not just a select few who have political power, political connections. As a former k-12 student in Glastonbury schools, I know how great we can be if many more are invited to help shape policy—those of us on the ground with teaching and education backgrounds, not just because one attended school, but those of us who have a much fuller and robust knowledge base of teaching, learning, schooling, and educating.

Thank you for your time reading my testimony.

Saluti,



Michael D. Bartone, Ph.D.